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Using stories in coach education

Kitrina Douglas

University of Bristol

David Carless

Leeds Metropolitan University

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Address for correspondence:

Kitrina Douglas

University of Bristol

Department of Exercise Nutrition and Health Sciences

Tyndall Avenue

Bristol BS8 1TP, UK

Phone: +44 7774 816401

Email: k.douglas@bristol.ac.uk

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how storied representations of research can be used as an effective pedagogical tool in coach education. During a series of continuing professional development seminars for professional golf coaches, we presented our research in the form of stories and poems which were created in an effort to evoke and communicate the lived experiences of elite professional golfers. Following these presentations, we obtained written responses to the stories from 53 experienced coaches who attended the seminars. Analysis of this data revealed three ways in which coaches responded to the stories: (i) *questioning*; (ii) *summarising*; and (iii) *incorporating*. We conclude that these responses illustrate the potential of storied forms of representation to enhance professional development through stimulating reflective practice and increasing understanding of holistic person-centred approaches to coaching athletes in high performance sport.

Using stories in coach education

It is well accepted that coaches play a unique and central role in improving and developing the sports skills and performances of elite and professional athletes. In the wake of a number of studies which suggest that athletes' personal well-being and development can be sacrificed in the pursuit of sport success [e.g., 1, 2, 3] several scholars have asked whether it is time that coaches expanded their horizons to also consider the broader lifestyle issues that exist alongside sport performance. Miller and Kerr [4] are among those who suggest it is not only possible but that it is an ethical and moral imperative that coaches address broader health, developmental, and well-being issues. Doing so, these authors argue, will not only facilitate smoother, less traumatic career transitions, but will also enhance long-term performance.

One route identified in the literature to promote long-term development and well-being alongside sport performance has been described as a holistic, athlete-centred approach to coaching [4, 5, 6]. This type of approach may be a particular challenge to established coaches, however, who while being well educated in the technical, technological, biomechanical, and physiological needs of performers, are likely to have received less formal education concerning the broader developmental needs of elite athletes [7, 8]. However, as Miller and Kerr [4] suggest, coaches “have responsibilities that extend far beyond developing athletes' physical skills” (p. 146) contributing to an environment where “personal excellence” is seen to be as important as “performance excellence”.

In order to begin to address these issues, Miller and Kerr [4] suggest that coaches need professional education which encourages them to: (a) become more reflective practitioners, (b) coach holistically, and (c) adopt an athlete-centred approach to coaching. We would briefly like

to outline these concepts before considering how they might be addressed in the context of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes.

(a) *Reflective practice* allows the coach to learn from his or her coaching experiences and to change and adapt in response to what has been learned. It is viewed as integral to continued professional development because it encourages coaches to be more aware not only of their competencies and areas of weakness but also their biases and attitudes [9, 10]. Despite the importance of reflective practice in the professional development of coaches, Knowles, Borrie, and Telfer [11] write that few educational programmes actively nurture reflective skills.

(b) *Coaching holistically*. A second area highlighted by Miller and Kerr [4] is the need for coaches to adopt a holistic approach whereby knowledge from a number of areas are integrated with technical competencies rather than compartmentalised. In this regard, “to coach holistically is to draw on many knowledge sources and considerations, and to decide, with insight, how to amalgamate and utilise them in what fashion, when and where to the benefit of those being coached” [12, p. 4]. As such this perspective encourages the coach to consider more than the technical requirements of the individual in a particular sport and give consideration to, for example, the social, psychological, spiritual, emotional, and cultural dimensions. While a holistic approach may mean that the coaching process becomes more complex for the coach, it is likely to be experienced by athletes as more integrated.

(c) *An athlete-centred approach* refers to an ethos and philosophy whereby the person – and their long-term health and well-being – is seen as central to the coaching process. Through this orientation, the developmental needs of the individual are considered across numerous domains and across the life course, rather than solely in the sport arena and for the duration of the athletic career [13]. Although Miller and Kerr [4] use the term “athlete-centred,” we prefer the term *person-centred* to avoid prioritising the athletic self above other possible selves or identities.

For us, placing the “athlete” at the centre risks elevating sport-related needs over and above other domains of life. The concept of a person-centred approach was developed by psychologist Carl Rogers [14], who viewed the person as in the process of “becoming” within numerous life domains. In coaching terms, this translates to sport being seen as just one area of life where an individual may seek to fulfil her or his potentialities. To take up this ideological challenge, Miller and Kerr [4] suggest coaches consider the following kinds of questions: “How are the decisions we’re making today going to affect this young person as an athlete, and as a person, long after the competitive career is over?” and “Will these decisions contribute to the development of a well-rounded individual upon retirement?” (p. 146).

Integrating These Approaches in CPD

Thomlinson and Strachan [15] write that while coaches’ technical competencies are often well catered for in existing coach education programmes, holistic developmental issues are not routinely a focus of study. This suggests that coaches, particularly individuals who qualified some years previously, may not have had the opportunity to explore these issues as part of their formal education. On this basis, we believe there is a need to provide opportunities for learning in CPD programmes which foreground reflective practice alongside a holistic, person-centred approach. But, we asked ourselves, ask how might these learning opportunities be implemented in practice?

One answer which we have explored during the course of providing CPD seminars for professional golf coaches on behalf of the Professional Golfers Association of GB, is the use of storied forms to represent research findings. In the course of conducting a range of research projects which have explored the lives of elite athletes [16, 17, 18, 19, 20] we have utilised alternative approaches to representing our findings in an effort to make our research accessible to a wider audience of practitioners [e.g., 17, 20]. We have found that these stories have been

effective in stimulating interest and discussion among coaches, sport psychologists, performance directors, lifestyle advisors, and governing body officials during presentations made to the Irish Institute of Sport and the Dutch Golf Federation as well as during lectures to sports science students at several European universities. These positive experiences led us to wonder whether stories might be useful in tackling recent coaching developments and thinking in CPD settings. In short, we hoped that the stories might be a way in which we could move towards promoting the more holistic person-centered approach advocated by Miller and Kerr.

The Potential of Storied Representations

By choosing to publish our research in the form of stories and poetic representations [21, 17, 22, 20] we have attempted to take advantage of the multitude of potential benefits that these representational genres provide. These benefits have been discussed elsewhere (see for example 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29) and we do not wish to dwell on them at length here. That said, we would like to echo one point concerning the potential of storied forms of communication to provide new insights and understandings through considering others' life experiences. As Frank [30] has noted,

Those who accept an invitation into the storytelling relation open themselves to seeing (and feeling and hearing) life differently than they normally do. Listening is not so much a willing suspension of disbelief as a willing acceptance of different beliefs and of lives in which these beliefs make sense ... Those who have accepted the invitation to the story may not choose to remain in the world of the story, but if the story works, then life in their worlds will seem different after they return there. (p. 361)

For us, the potential of stories to stimulate new ways of seeing the world suggests a possible unique and valuable role for storytelling in coach education contexts.

While storied approaches remain rare in sport research, some scholars have drawn upon this genre to represent and disseminate their research in sport. For example, Jim Denison created three short stories through his research into the retirement experiences of New Zealand athletes [31]. Denison suggests this approach provided three distinct benefits: (i) athletes were permitted a voice that had been absent in earlier research using questionnaires and scales, (ii) it allowed personal stories to become collective stories, and (iii) it allowed coaches to become more aware of how to assist athletes who exit sport. In a similar way, Olympic rower Tosha Tsang [32] used three stories to illuminate how female identity, national identity, and racial identity can become sites of tension as the homogenizing influence of elite sport and a singular athletic identity are integrated, negotiated, or resisted.

On the basis of our own work, we would like add two further reasons why storied forms of representation might be effective in assisting experienced coaches develop their understanding of developmental issues among elite athletes. Firstly, according to narrative theorists such as Bruner [33] and McCleod [34], humans are storied beings and communication through the telling of stories is a fundamental human activity. While traditional scientific forms of communication (e.g., statistical analyses) have their place, coaches are often *not* statisticians or scientists. As a result, a reliance on scientific forms of communication may serve to alienate or de-motivate some coaches. In contrast, we suggest that most coaches are active *storytellers*; many routinely cultivate stories in order to, for example, motivate athletes. By drawing on a storied form of communication we are thereby utilising a method of dissemination that coaches and athletes are probably already familiar with.

Secondly, relating specifically to reflectivity, Kendall and Murray [25] suggest stories and poems provide the hearer with the opportunity to engage differently with the data, approaching them more slowly, hearing the stories or poems in their head, being more alert and interested, and

more willing to engage emotionally with what is being said. Therefore the process of reading and listening to stories and poems offers greater potential to explore data in alternative and complex ways that has the potential to mobilise an empathetic, emotional response [35, 26, 27, 28]. In this way, coaches personal responses to stories can become a catalyst for ongoing personal and collective learning.

Given these benefits, the purpose of this study was to explore the potential of storied forms of representation as an effective pedagogical tool in coach education. Specifically, we presented a series of previously published stories and poetic representations which explore the experiences of female professional tournament golfers [17, 20] to professional golf coaches during a series of CPD seminars. These coaches provided written and verbal feedback on their reactions to the stories which comprise the data for this study.

Method

Research Design

The design of this study has been adapted from what Rovegno, Nevett, and Babiarz, [36, p. 347], define as a *teaching experiment*. Although this type of design has been specifically deployed in education, we believe it has potential in coaching and coach education contexts. Four foundational goals of teaching experiments, discussed by Rovegno and colleagues [36], formed the basis of this study: (a) to examine teaching, learning and subject matter as part of a complex system. In the context of this study, we examined how we as educators contribute to coaches' learning and how stories and poems (as subject matter) stimulated critical reflection and challenged coaches; (b) to describe the learning as it occurs in the classroom. In this regard we described how coaches responded to alternative representations of research, and comment on individual as well as collaborative learning; (c) to identify, from the teacher's perspective, the issues, problems and challenges that arise during teaching. In line with this point we documented

how we as teachers learned from this approach as issues were raised during group discussions; and (d) to develop, refine or provide illustrations of theory. To pursue this point we explore coaches' responses to the stories in the context of contemporary theories of narrative and stories.

Participants and Setting

The participants were 53 qualified golf coaches (3 female, 50 male) including several national coaches from the Irish, Dutch, and Scottish golf unions. All coaches were currently coaching in the UK or Europe and attended one of three CPD seminars held at the PGA's headquarters in Birmingham, England or at regional training centres in Glasgow, Scotland and Dublin, Ireland. The age range of participants was from 24 years to 51 years with a mean age of 29.4 years. All coaches gave permission for their responses to be included in the data analysis process.

Procedures

The focus of the study was to explore coaches' responses to three story forms which we developed from previous research. Each story comprised an account of the life experiences of a highly successful female professional tournament golfer. We have described the process by which these stories and poetic representations were created elsewhere [17, 20]. All the stories drew heavily on the participants' own words, thereby foregrounding the story of each woman's life as related during the research interviews. The three stories focussed on: (i) a *performance narrative* where sport occupies a central and overriding place in the storyteller's life [see 17]; (ii) a *discovery narrative* where sport is just one part of rich and exciting life of life [see 17]; and (iii) a *relational narrative* where the storyteller's primary focus was on relationships with other's rather than sport performance [see 20]. Further details of the stories are provided in the Appendix.

To gather data on the participants' responses, a questionnaire was designed by both researchers which provided demographic information of the participant, contact details, a self-description of their role in golf, and space to document their responses to each story. To allow maximum freedom for participants to use their own terminology, to identify issues that were applicable to their own interests/coaching practice/knowledge, information given to participants regarding how they should complete the questionnaire was purposefully brief. The questionnaire was piloted first with students at the first author's institution where 45 MSc students provided written feedback, and at Coimbra University in Portugal, where 32 MSc students provided written feedback. Following these presentations the questionnaire was modified slightly to provide more room for responses and to simplify instructions.

Immediately before the stories and poems were read, verbal directions were provided and any questions regarding the questionnaire were answered. Following a reading of each story participants were asked to respond to the story and were given ten minutes to do so before the next story was presented. After all the stories and poems had been read and feedback sheets had been completed, a focus group discussion took place during which time issues raised by coaches in each group were discussed and explored further. During these discussions, Kitrina adopted the role of facilitator while David kept written notes on the dialogue which took place. Following each seminar we took part in a debriefing session during which time we recorded further reactions, thoughts, and observations in our reflexive diaries. These writings provided a secondary source of data.

Data Analysis

As recommended by Miles and Huberman [37], textual data (feedback sheets, field notes, and diaries from the seminars) were first transferred to a computer and represented in tabulated form. Both researchers then read through all textual data to become immersed in the data and

personal reflections and comments were noted at this stage. Following this process, a content analysis was undertaken whereby we looked for patterns in the data and identified more general themes which linked excerpts from the textual data to existing narrative theory in keeping with the foundational goals of the teaching experiment.

Findings

We identified three themes in the data that typify different ways in which coaches responded to the stories. We describe these as: (a) *questioning*, (b) *summarising*, and (c) *incorporating* the story. In what follows, we provide examples of these response styles and discuss each response style in relation to existing research.

Questioning the Story

A common way that coaches responded to the stories was by asking questions. Questioning, we suggest, is important in that it indicates that a degree of personal reflection on the story has taken place. In particular, the presence of questions about each story suggests that coaches took the stories seriously and had begun to consider the possible implications of each story. A general type of question which some coaches asked was: “what needs to be done?” or “what should we do?” In posing these types of question the individual seemed to be seeking resolution without necessarily engaging with the dilemmas the story evoked. For us these responses illustrate a one-dimensional model of problem solving which is likely to have limited value in practical settings [38, 39]. Mostly, however, questions were more interactive and specific in nature, relating closely to issues arising from a particular story. For example, the performance story resulted in the following kinds of questions being raised:

Would be interesting to find out how when she stops playing golf what substitute will she find as a replacement for golf? What after golf? (male, age not known)

Career, focused performer. Feel very sad for this athlete. This would be the ideal candidate for the loony bin! Have to give them praise for their dedication but at what costs to their long term 'life?' What happens when they stop playing/performing? (male, 43)

This player invests all her eggs in one basket, if something happens to the basket, she is in trouble. A bad round means loss of confidence in herself as a person. This notably happens to all top athletes, the secret is minimising the time that feeling lasts, getting things in perspective. But how can you get things in perspective if you are on such a single track? (male, age not known)

As well as illustrating that coaches were contemplating the unique dynamics of the particular situation and how to act in response to such a situation, these excerpts reflect an important issue that is relevant across high performance sport, namely how to encourage athletes to 'keep things in perspective,' to not 'put all their eggs in one basket,' and to consider 'life after sport'. The questions provide evidence of coaches being aware of and reflecting on the difficult and problematic nature of an exclusive performance focus and a competitive culture that expects sacrifice and dedication.

In contrast to the "what happens next" type questions raised by the performance story, questions regarding the other stories were markedly different. Although many coaches found the performance story "sad", most appeared to accept the story as an accurate account of how an individual may achieve success in elite sport. In contrast, many coaches could *not* understand or make sense of the relational story; they were unable to comprehend that a young woman could reach an elite level in sport for a parent rather than for herself. Here are three examples:

I would have thought that it would be difficult to be successful if you were not playing for your own enjoyment. Motivation from the parent was huge factor. How could parent not know the real truth about his daughter? (male, 37)

Golf is a job she doesn't enjoy. Playing the part, acting, why? Responsibility to others? Respect for the game? (male, 40)

Unfortunate introduction to the game and always seeking to perform for someone else's pleasure. Always trying to please and worry what someone else thinks: Why? (male, 34)

For us, the different types of questions in response to the performance versus the relational story illustrate deep-seated issues within the broader culture of elite sport. Coaches were very willing to accept and believe the performance story, we suggest, because this is the kind of story that is routinely told within the culture of elite sport. As we have previously observed, “the dominant narrative or discourse within sporting contexts is one which demands that elite athletes – indeed *any* athletes who wish to become successful – must dedicate their lives to training, preparation, and competition” [17, p. 15]. In this sense, coaches are highly familiar with this type of story and are likely to accept it as ‘the way things are’ rather than challenge the socially constructed nature of this discourse. In contrast, relationally-oriented stories are generally *not* widely told or heard. Indeed, “the suggestion that money, glory, and trophies cannot compare to a relationship is dynamite in a sporting world which promotes money, glory, and trophies as the ultimate satisfaction and interests of the self as paramount” [17, p. 24). In this light, relational stories can be understood as contravening what people generally expect to hear in a story about life in elite sport. As a result, the listener is challenged and has to work hard to make sense of the story precisely because it is at odds with the dominant narrative. This response – and the questions that result – is demonstrated in the preceding excerpts.

The questions that arose from the stories generally led to animated debates between group members during the facilitated discussions. For example, some coaches subscribed to the performance narrative and believed that there was no other route to success than total dedication and single-minded focus. In one individual's words, "To be successful the game has to be the most important thing in your life. This is why this person has won 13 times on tour" (male, 51). Other coaches believed that alternatives (such as a discovery focus) were a real possibility for all performers and that these routes would promote long-term well-being and development. Reflecting on these discussions it seems the stories opened up space for individuals holding competing beliefs to engage in dialogue in a way that lead to deeper understanding of the complexity of athletes' lives as well as considerations of parental and governing bodies reactions to more holistic person-centred approaches. Several coaches articulated a view that the process of questioning and discussing was beneficial because typically they have to deal with performance directors, governing officials and parents on their own. Therefore knowing that they had thought through, reflected upon and discussed these issues with others, coaches felt they could promote a more holistic person-centred approach with greater conviction.

Summarising the Story

Several coaches responded to the stories by providing a summary – or synopsis – of the story or the storyteller. For example, a 29 year-old male made the following observations on the three stories:

Performance story: 1. Ultra competitive, driven by success, reliant on confidence. 2.

Gains self-esteem from positive play and others. 3. Lack of balance in life. *Discovery*

story: 1. Pragmatic, realistic approach. 2. Views golf merely as an occupation. 3. Lots of goals, ambitions outside golf. 4. Balanced. *Relational story:* 1. Plays for parental

approval. 2. His pressure/expectations. 3. Life without passion! 4. Never satisfied as father was never satisfied.

Tables 1 and 2 provide further examples of how two individual coaches responded to the stories by providing a list of some type. We suggest that these kinds of responses are akin to Frank's (1995) notion of *thinking about stories*. In Frank's [40] terms, "To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyze that content" (p. 23). Thus, this kind of response is characterised by an analytical process that involves summarising the story in a relatively distanced, uninvolved, and unemotional fashion.

While this response style suggests a relatively low level of involvement with the story, the detail within each individual's response provides evidence that coaches actively listened to the stories and thought sufficiently deeply about the stories to create their own list of important issues or conclusions. This process in itself is likely to be important if new learning and insights are to be generated from listening to stories. According to McLeod [34],

in telling stories we are 'telling more than we know'. A story can be heard or read in different ways. The story carries meaning that the reader or hearer must work to unpack. In everyday life, the stories we tell each other are unpacked to a very limited extent. (p. 112)

We suggest that, in the context of a group-based coach education seminar, a deeper level of thinking and reflection occurred than might take place in everyday practice. That is, coaches who summarised – or 'thought about' the stories in an analytic fashion – seemed to *get something* from the stories through considering the stories of each woman's life. Given that these 'lessons' were not *explicit* in the stories (i.e. different coaches drew different lessons), we suggest that coaches engaged in some degree of independent and critical thinking in order to formulate for

themselves, in the context of their own professional lives, what it is that they might learn from each story.

While some coaches provided only a list type summary, several went on to generalize from the storyteller's experience by summarising a lesson or interpretation which they thought would apply to other golfers. For example, one coach responded to the discovery story with the following words: "Enjoys life and living. *It's important to believe that you cannot control the result you can only control the process.* This person enjoys life and uses golf to fund it" (male, 40). Here, the italicised sentence summarises a more general psychological point which was, for this coach, inherent in the story. Other individuals summarised a story in such a way that they anticipated future problems and some went on to make recommendations concerning what might be done to help, support, or cater for the storyteller. For example:

Career focussed performer ... this person would require a sound support mechanism around them (male, 43)

I feel very sad that this person's self-esteem is so linked to her performance. She needs to have much more balance in life. She needs to find other interests now so she can ease into retirement. It could be very painful (Male, 48)

Comments such as these suggest that coaches used the stories as an opportunity to 'dry run' or test out their existing knowledge in the context of the storyteller's experiences. In the context of a group-based educational environment, coaches were subsequently able to react to and engage in what Schon [41] terms reflective conversations because the stories provided a catalyst through which coaches could creatively engage with practical dilemmas in a way in which Jones [12] suggests the standard model of coach education does not permit.

Incorporating the Story

The third type of response identified was where the listener *incorporated* the story within their own experience in some way by using comments such as “this is just like me,” by describing their own life in golf as “like” one of the story types, or by experiencing an emotional reaction to the story. Particularly noticeable in these kinds of responses were expressions of empathy with the storyteller and a sense of identification with the events, motives, or orientations associated with a particular story type.

For us, this kind of response is akin to Frank’s [40] description of *thinking with* stories. Ellis and Bochner [42] characterize ‘thinking with’ stories as “allowing yourself to resonate with the story, reflect on it, become part of it” (p.753) as the following examples show:

(a) the performance story:

When I was at my peak this is just how I felt. Luckily other things became more important to me (male, 51)

(I) had wins and can associate with this feeling of victory and all that goes with it. A wonderful association with winning a tournament (male, 31)

Sad but can understand where they are coming from. I see a lot of me in this person where winning ruled my life and my performance dictated my attitude to life/family/friends. I would attempt to it all differently if I had my time again (male, 43)

(b) the discovery story:

An attitude that I can relate in some ways to and find very refreshing that golf is not the be all and end all. The fact that she had other interests probably took a lot of pressure off her in tournament situations (Go Girl!) (male, 34)

Interesting character: Sounds like me, apart from the giving birth bit. Seems a bit scatter brained but having and going to have a fulfilling life (male, 34)

I like this person, success is the vision. A great outlook on what life is all about. A broad range of ideas, thinking beyond the game, certainly more to life than one single mind set (male, 27)

(c) the relational story:

It is difficult for me to understand the reasons for someone throwing a game. Probably because I am more of the performance type when I played on tour. I would have thought this type would be more balanced but it would appear not from the poems (male, 43)

Sad that she never took enjoyment of the game for her self (female, 48)

These comments illustrate how some coaches' experiences resonated with a particular story or aspect of it, leading to reflection – and sometimes the adoption of a different perspective – on their own behaviour and how they might have made different choices.

In sharing their responses in group discussion, those coaches who reconsidered their own behaviour in the wake of the stories provided a further valuable pedagogical opportunity. For example, one coach's candid explanation of why "I would attempt to do it all differently if I had my time again" provided a chance for us, collectively, to consider and discuss in more depth how these types of changes might occur in practice and what factors were involved in him coming to this realisation. Collectively, we were also able to reflect on the negative consequences of prioritising sport performance over and above other areas of life and consider the ways in which we, as coaches and educators, might perpetuate a totalitarian performance focus among the athletes with whom we work. In particular, coaches began to be more aware of the kinds of stories they share with athletes and how accepted cultural stories such as "give me everything you've got" or "no pain no gain" type discourses might negatively affect athlete's long term well-being.

While the performance discourse dominates elite sport [17], the above excerpts show coaches reflecting on the consequences of this discourse in the shared context of their own and the storyteller's lives. Reacting to the single-minded focus on sport within the performance story, one coach reflected that "other things ... luckily ... became more important to me." While these comments illustrate a process of critical reflection, they also portray a potentially significant shift in terms of the kind of thinking or reflection these coaches engaged in. Specifically, we suggest that these examples show coaches taking a more holistic, life span, person-centred perspective linking early career choices with developmental issues later in life. Further, it appears that these individuals were then beginning to wrestle with moral and ethical issues associated with these choices and link these to the ways in which athletes may be encouraged to prioritise sport performance over other areas of life. In so doing, several coaches voiced concerns on the implications this prioritisation had on their own lives or the lives of athletes they coach.

Discussion

We have identified above three ways in which coaches responded to the stories we provided: questioning, summarising, and incorporating. We have suggested that these response styles provide evidence that the stories stimulated a degree of reflection and critical thinking about holistic issues such as athlete well-being and career progression. But what is it about the stories that stimulated these kinds of responses? We wish now to explore this question by considering our findings in the light of existing literature and theory concerning story and narrative. In what follows, we suggest that three interrelated qualities of stories – namely *openness*, *replay* or *freeze-frame*, and *promoting an ethical or moral standpoint* – provide a more explicit understanding of the benefits of stories in CPD settings. By drawing these more general interpretations, we hope to show how stories – and the different kinds of responses they may elicit – can be a useful way to stimulate reflection and learning in coach education contexts.

With regard to *openness*, narrative theorists suggest that through retaining a degree of openness, stories stand in contrast to more scientific forms of knowing which are ill-suited to communicating multiple perspectives, ambiguities, and uncertainties [see 29]. According to McLeod [34], “The existence of ambiguity as a fundamental property of stories has the effect of forcing the reader or listener to engage in an active process of meaning-making whenever a story is offered. There can be no one definitive ‘reading’” (p. 36). By resisting providing singular interpretations of personal experiences, we believe these stories encouraged coaches to form their own interpretations. This point is illustrated in the following contrasting feedback to each story type: (a) the relational story:

Sad to spend you life hating your work in order to please someone else. This girl obviously needs some sort of counselling (male, 51)

Tries to make others happy regardless of their own wants, feelings, desires. Superbly talented to win and be successful when seemingly would rather be anywhere else. A fantastic professional (male, 32)

(b) the discovery story:

Sounds a more balanced person, multi sided, much more contented, knows what she wants, has experienced ups and downs but can separate golf, love, life and children into what seems to be a fairly balanced and varied life, very level headed, sublimely skilled (male, 32)

She says she is doing it for her child but is leaving her child best for child? Maybe a bit selfish? (male, 43)

(c) the performance story:

All about success, winning and what that brings. Massive drive and determination.

Success brings self-worth (male, 26)

I have always believed in family first career second. What will this girl have when she retires from golf? If she has these beliefs she may perform better, then again maybe not (male, 40)

Apparent within each pair of responses is a degree of diversity in terms of how each story has been interpreted. In other words, the meaning of each story – and the conclusions and lessons which may be derived from it – are not fixed or final. As Frank [43] reminds us, the quality of openness is a necessary one if we are to raise and explore issues without falling into the trap of premature closure through ‘finalising’ the life of the person (or people) portrayed in the story. For us, this point is an important part of our rationale for including stories as a component of coach education in that, like Carless and Sparkes [21], our aim

is not to prompt a single, closed, convergent reading but to invite the reader to contribute their own questions-answers-experiences to the stories as they read them ... operating in this mode, we seek a different relationship between author, text and reader where the reader, instead of being a passive ‘receiver’ of knowledge, becomes a co-participant in the creation of meaning. (p. 14-15)

The active process of meaning-making which McLeod [34] describes as central to listening to stories can, we think, be a valuable aspect of continuing professional development for coaches who are likely to benefit from reflection and interrogation of others’ experiences in sport.

In recent years coaching research has begun to recognise, that “knowledge is constructed through experimenting with new, and modifying existing, information within a context of critical reflection” and “grappling with unique practical problems and dilemmas which defy standard solutions provides the foundation of both personal and professional development” [12, p.9]. The questions raised by coaches, and the different standpoints they adopted, illustrate these points in action; that is, coaches were “grappling with” and modifying existing information in light of each

story because the story defied a one-dimensional resolution. From a pedagogical perspective, providing storied accounts which resist simplistic solutions to complex and messy realities appears to be a successful way to enhance reflection and critical thinking. Allowing coaches to share their responses through group discussion further enhances learning opportunities through mutual consideration of alternative perspectives.

A further quality of stories is that they allow the possibility to *replay* or *freeze* specific represented moments of lived experience. It is, we suggest, through replaying or freezing events which in ‘real life’ scenarios may occur “in a blur” that a more thorough process of reflection and reconsideration becomes possible. This process, we suggest, thereby encourages and supports reflection and, subsequently, new learning. According to Freeman [44],

human existence frequently involves a *delay*, or ‘postponement,’ of insight into its affairs: realizations, narrative connections, are made after-the-fact, when the dust has settled. The result is that we are frequently *late* in our own understanding of things. This is particularly so in the moral domain, where there is a tendency to act first and think later.
(p. 136)

Delayed insights of this kind were very much evident in the several coaches’ responses to the stories. One clear example was the way in which several coaches reconsidered previous actions or events in their own lives in the light of the story. Some even suggested they would do things differently as a result of insights gained through hearing the stories. It is also, we believe, through replaying experiences in a story form that some coaches were able to seriously consider moral and ethical issues. Some individuals reviewed their personal moral or ethical stance in light of one or more of the stories. Examples of this included coaches who shifted their moral position moving from a view that being totally “dedicated” to playing sport for the self is considered

acceptable when a person is viewed solely as a performer, but is recast as “selfish” and unacceptable when the performer is also understood as a mother.

In this regard, we suggest that stories can act to *promote an ethical or moral standpoint in listeners*. Denzin [45] writes that performative texts such as stories have the potential to bring “a moral compass back into the reader’s (and the writer’s) life” (p. 118). In the context of an increasingly technological and science-dominated sport culture, we suggest that these kinds of moral and ethical education are particularly important. In Frank’s [30] terms,

more knowledge may be less important than a clearer sense of value ... Put another way, the old faith was that more facts and better theories would render ethical dilemmas moot; the new realization is that knowledge only increases the density of ethical dilemmas ... Deciding what to do about what we know requires having an ethical standpoint. The challenge for intellectuals is to help people make policy, clinical, corporate, and personal decisions in a milieu of profound dislocation. (p. 363)

We echo these sentiments within the context of elite sport and suggest that as educators it is critical that we find ways to help coaches consider their moral and ethical stance in order to develop a personal coaching philosophy. It seems to us that within the contemporary elite sport culture it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify an appropriate course of action *without* first taking an ethical and moral position. While we have tried other pedagogical strategies in CPD seminars, we have found these stories to be a much more effective tool for stimulating critical reflection on the challenging moral and ethical issues which are part and parcel of coaching elites in high performance sport.

Conclusion

In the introduction we brought attention to three topical issues concerning coaching athletes in high performance sport. That is, how do we, in the context of CPD, encourage coaches

to reflect on the ways in which their own practice addresses the holistic needs of athletes through taking a person-centred approach? We have suggested that using storied forms of communication in educational settings is one way to meet this challenge. We therefore hope that this paper contributes to earlier work in this area [5, 38, 46] by showing how stories can be an effective pedagogical tool to stimulate ongoing professional development. Specifically, our findings suggest that using stories in coach education encourages coaches to consider adopting a more holistic person-centred outlook which Miller and Kerr (among others) suggest is critical if athletes in high performance sport are to be more effectively supported. Further, the responses suggest that stories can provide a catalyst for coaches to explore their own subjective, moral and ethical beliefs in a supportive environment which more closely aligns with the dynamic nature of their work. This process is necessary if coaches are to find ethically and morally informed resolutions to the many complex issues that arise in high performance sport.

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Table 1: Responses of male age 40

<i>Performance</i>	<i>Discovery</i>	<i>Relational</i>
Missed cuts Letting people down Does not accept failure and willing to work harder to improve Willing to sacrifice for the limelight	Not performance related Happiness more important Free spirit Easily led Responsible Rounded person Emotional Friendly Sometimes confused Patient easy going	Friends and family important, Pleasing others, weak, no self motivation Self controlled, Strong Talented Brave Under pressure to perform Didn't enjoy competition, Not suited to game Lacking in interest but good enough to succeed

Table 2: Responses of male age 32

<i>Performance</i>	<i>Discovery</i>	<i>Relational</i>
Don't love it Ego boosted Missed cuts –self – esteem lower lower Most important thing in my life Obsessive Retirement – loosing a limb Imbalanced Lonely no fun one way	Have fun exciting Winning is important but not the only thing, different things, owner of life, job = money, my mind, golf not the priority. Into everything not enough time in day too balanced / positive happy	Dad – followed me /watched me It was for him played didn't like it never done it for me. Don't want the pressure, worry about losing, wanted to be happy Golf was natural to me they wanted me to play Golf was a business I didn't want to be there Not happy for someone else forced into it no balance

Appendix: Précis of the story types

The stories as originally published [see 17 & 20] are presented in the words of three women professional golfers as they reflect on their lives. All of these women were highly successful, representing their country at amateur level and winning multiple tournaments at professional level. We offer here a brief précis of each story type but urge the interested reader to consult the original versions as stories, ultimately, are irreducible; no summary can do the work of the story.

Performance Narrative

We describe this story a ‘performance narrative’ to highlight how performance-related concerns can come to infuse all areas of life. This narrative type is a story of single-minded dedication to sport performance to the exclusion of all other areas of life and self. It provides illustrations of how and why for some athletes ‘sport is life and life is sport’ and shows the fragile nature of self-worth when it comes to be dependent on sport performance. The story also shows how a glorified self and overriding athletic identity can develop in the context of elite sport, and how these can come to be problematic in terms of long term well-being when retirement is equated to loss. Of particular concern within the terms of the performance narrative is a totalitarian belief that all performers *have* to be this way in order to achieve success, as the storyteller put it: “I think for all of us, it (sport) becomes our whole life.”

Discovery Narrative

This story is about exploration and discovery. The storyteller discovers and explores a life full of people, places and experiences in a full and multifaceted sense using sport as a conduit to achieve these aims. Thus golf is considered to be one part of a full, rich and multidimensional life; there are no signs of an overriding athletic identity or glorified self. The teller recounts how she achieved success in golf without prioritising sport over other areas of life allowing her to maintain and develop other roles, identities and interests (such as travel, being a partner, being a

mother). In this story, self-worth is not dependent on sport achievement, but related to negotiating multiple roles and activities while living a full, rich life. For this teller, retirement is expected to be an opportunity for new exploration and discovery rather than a time of loss. For these reasons, we consider the discovery narrative to be the antithesis of the performance narrative in that the teller experiences the very ‘life’ that the performance storyteller believes she must sacrifice.

Relational Narrative

We call this story type a ‘relational narrative’ to draw attention to the complex interdependent connection between two people in which sport performance was essentially a by-product. Although it could be said all narratives are relational in that they exist within relations with others, we use the term here to highlight that, for this storyteller, the *relationship* is valued above all else. The story shows how a valued relationship with a significant other shapes from a young age this storyteller’s involvement in elite sport. For her, “being with” – as in “I liked being with my dad” – is more important than her achievement of tournament successes, trophies and glory. Altruistic rather than ego motivation dominates the story as the storyteller places the perceived needs of others above the needs of the self: “his pleasure was enough.” Like the discovery narrative, this narrative type explicitly challenges the assumptions of those who tell performance stories because the teller achieved success at the highest level *without* subscribing to the values and behaviours scripted in the performance narrative.